CHECKLIST ENVIRONMENTAL ASSESSMENT

Project Name:	Malta HWY 191 Gravel Testing
Proposed Implementation Date:	May 2021
Proponent:	DNRC
Location:	Northeast Quarter of Section 16 T29N R29E
County:	Phillips

I. TYPE AND PURPOSE OF ACTION

The Minerals Management Bureau of the DNRC is evaluating the impact of testing gravel on Trust Lands in Phillips County. The testing and logging will be performed by employees of TLMD.

If approved, The DNRC would test the gravel source contained within the above referenced section. Gravel and dirt would be excavated from the ground and sub-surface using an excavator. Topsoil would be saved, and any disturbance created will be reclaimed immediately upon completion of logging the test pit.

II. PROJECT DEVELOPMENT

1. PUBLIC INVOLVEMENT, AGENCIES, GROUPS OR INDIVIDUALS CONTACTED:

Provide a brief chronology of the scoping and ongoing involvement for this project.

State of Montana, Department of Natural Resources and Conservation (DNRC) - Surface and Mineral Owner. Zack Winfield, Petroleum Engineer and Dustin Lenz, NELO Land Use Specialist. DNRC. The Environmental Assessment was constructed by Zack Winfield in May 2021.

East Malta Hutterian Brethren– Ag and Grazing Lessee, contacted by Department prior to testing.

2. OTHER GOVERNMENTAL AGENCIES WITH JURISDICTION, LIST OF PERMITS NEEDED:

None

3. ALTERNATIVES CONSIDERED:

No Action Alternative: The DNRC would not be allowed to test gravel from Montana Trust Lands.

Action Alternative: The DNRC would be allowed to test the gravel source in section 16 of Township 29 North Range 29 East.

III. IMPACTS ON THE PHYSICAL ENVIRONMENT

- *RESOURCES potentially impacted are listed on the form, followed by common issues that would be considered.*
- *Explain POTENTIAL IMPACTS AND MITIGATIONS following each resource heading.*
- *Enter "NONE" If no impacts are identified or the resource is not present.*

4. GEOLOGY AND SOIL QUALITY, STABILITY AND MOISTURE:
Consider the presence of fragile, compactable or unstable soils. Identify unusual geologic features. Specify any special reclamation considerations. Identify any cumulative impacts to soils.

The Northeast quarter of Section 16 T29N-R29E has geology comprised of two members. The first member is Alluvium and Colluvium which is dominantly sand, silt, clay, and subordinate gravel, deposited on relatively gentle slopes primarily by sheetwash and gravity processes. Variable thickness, generally less than 10 m (33 ft).

The second member is the Glacial deposit which is primarily till and outwash deposited by glaciers, but also includes local glacial lake and other glacial deposits. Locally derived, poorly sorted, unconsolidated, boulder deposits with clasts as large as 3 m (10 ft) in diameter.

Soils in the NE quarter of section 16 consist of Lostriver-Bullhook Complex and Telstad-Absher complex.

Topsoil and subsoil that is disturbed from the use of trucks or off-road vehicles will be reclaimed to their native state upon completion of the testing

5. WATER QUALITY, QUANTITY AND DISTRIBUTION:
Identify important surface or groundwater resources. Consider the potential for violation of ambient water quality standards, drinking water maximum contaminant levels, or degradation of water quality. Identify cumulative effects to water resources.

Section 16 contains Alkali Creek, which is approximately 200 feet south of the proposed project. The proposed action should not affect the abundance or quality of the water within Alkali Creek.

A search on the Montana Ground Water Information Center website found the closest well is 500 feet from the test location. The total depth of the well is 76 feet and the static water level is 6.50 feet. Gravel testing operations should not affect the abundance, or the quality of the water produced from this well or adjacent wells.

6. AIR QUALITY:
What pollutants or particulate would be produced? Identify air quality regulations or zones (e.g. Class I air shed) the project would influence. Identify cumulative effects to air quality.

An increase in airborne pollutants and particulates may occur during testing operations. This will be primarily dust particulates which should not affect the overall health of humans or other living organisms. The temporary increase will be insignificant.

7. VEGETATION COVER, QUANTITY AND QUALITY:
What changes would the action cause to vegetative communities? Consider rare plants or cover types that would be affected. Identify cumulative effects to vegetation.

Vegetation in Section 16 consists of Western Wheatgrass, Green Needlegrass, Needle and Thread, Blue Gramma, Prairie Junegrass, Sandberg Bluegrass, Threadleaf Sedge, Crested Wheatgrass, Prairie Sagewort and Kentucky Bluegrass

Vegetation on the proposed project will be disturbed during testing operations. Any areas that vegetation is disturbed, should come back voluntarily. If the disturbed areas are not revegetating voluntarily, reclamation to revegetate the disturbed areas will be done by the DNRC.

8. TERRESTRIAL, AVIAN AND AQUATIC LIFE AND HABITATS:
Consider substantial habitat values and use of the area by wildlife, birds or fish. Identify cumulative effects to fish and wildlife.

There may be minimal disruption to wildlife in the area. The scale and length of testing should not be enough to permanently disrupt wildlife species. Species in the area include antelope, whitetail deer, mule deer, raptors and other birds, various rodents, rabbits, reptiles and others.

9. UNIQUE, ENDANGERED, FRAGILE OR LIMITED ENVIRONMENTAL RESOURCES:
Consider any federally listed threatened or endangered species or habitat identified in the project area. Determine effects to wetlands. Consider Sensitive Species or Species of special concern. Identify cumulative effects to these species and their habitat.

A search was conducted using the Montana Natural Heritage Program database to identify point observations of species of concern in the section of the proposed activity. There was a point observation of a Golden Eagle near the project, in 1980. The scope and length of the project will not negatively affect sensitive species or their habitat.

This project is contained within General Sage Grouse Habitat. The Sage Grouse Habitat Conservation Program of the DNRC has been consulted and is determining if debits will be paid to habitat conservation.

10. HISTORICAL AND ARCHAEOLOGICAL SITES:
Identify and determine effects to historical, archaeological or paleontological resources.

A review of documented Cultural Resources was performed by Zack Winfield. There is one site lead and one registered site contained within section 16. The registered site is a bridge crossing Alkali Creek. The site lead is stone circles located in the W½ W½ NE¼ and E½ E½ SW¼ of section 16. These sites will be avoided and will not be disturbed during testing activities.

11. AESTHETICS:
Determine if the project is located on a prominent topographic feature, or may be visible from populated or scenic areas. What level of noise, light or visual change would be produced? Identify cumulative effects to aesthetics.

None.

12. DEMANDS ON ENVIRONMENTAL RESOURCES OF LAND, WATER, AIR OR ENERGY:
Determine the amount of limited resources the project would require. Identify other activities nearby that the project would affect. Identify cumulative effects to environmental resources.

Testing operations are not significant enough to effect limited resources.

13. OTHER ENVIRONMENTAL DOCUMENTS PERTINENT TO THE AREA:
List other studies, plans or projects on this tract. Determine cumulative impacts likely to occur as a result of current private, state or federal actions in the analysis area, and from future proposed state actions in the analysis area that are under MEPA review (scoped) or permitting review by any state agency.

None.

IV. IMPACTS ON THE HUMAN POPULATION

- *RESOURCES potentially impacted are listed on the form, followed by common issues that would be considered.*
- *Explain POTENTIAL IMPACTS AND MITIGATIONS following each resource heading.*
- *Enter "NONE" If no impacts are identified or the resource is not present.*

14. HUMAN HEALTH AND SAFETY:
Identify any health and safety risks posed by the project.

No human and health safety risks were identified as a result of the proposed project other than the typical occupational hazards that coincide with gravel testing operations.

15. INDUSTRIAL, COMMERCIAL AND AGRICULTURE ACTIVITIES AND PRODUCTION:
Identify how the project would add to or alter these activities.

Testing will not create a significant disturbance that would affect agriculture or grazing.

16. QUANTITY AND DISTRIBUTION OF EMPLOYMENT:
Estimate the number of jobs the project would create, move or eliminate. Identify cumulative effects to the employment market.

The proposed project would not create, move, or eliminate jobs.

17. LOCAL AND STATE TAX BASE AND TAX REVENUES:
Estimate tax revenue the project would create or eliminate. Identify cumulative effects to taxes and revenue.

No impact.

18. DEMAND FOR GOVERNMENT SERVICES:
Estimate increases in traffic and changes to traffic patterns. What changes would be needed to fire protection, police, schools, etc.? Identify cumulative effects of this and other projects on government services.

No impact.

19. LOCALLY ADOPTED ENVIRONMENTAL PLANS AND GOALS:
List State, County, City, USFS, BLM, Tribal, and other zoning or management plans, and identify how they would affect this project.

No known zoning or management plans exist for this area.

20. ACCESS TO AND QUALITY OF RECREATIONAL AND WILDERNESS ACTIVITIES:
Identify any wilderness or recreational areas nearby or access routes through this tract. Determine the effects of the project on recreational potential within the tract. Identify cumulative effects to recreational and wilderness activities.

No impact.

21. DENSITY AND DISTRIBUTION OF POPULATION AND HOUSING:
Estimate population changes and additional housing the project would require. Identify cumulative effects to population and housing.

No impact.

22. SOCIAL STRUCTURES AND MORES:
Identify potential disruption of native or traditional lifestyles or communities.

No impact.

23. CULTURAL UNIQUENESS AND DIVERSITY:
How would the action affect any unique quality of the area?

No impact.

24. OTHER APPROPRIATE SOCIAL AND ECONOMIC CIRCUMSTANCES:
Estimate the return to the trust. Include appropriate economic analysis. Identify potential future uses for the analysis area other than existing management. Identify cumulative economic and social effects likely to occur as a result of the proposed action.

Testing will not generate revenue nor damage potential the revenue generating potential of the trust. Gravel testing operations could lead to future activities that would generate significant revenue for the trust.

EA Checklist Prepared By:	**Name:**	Zackary Winfield	**Date:**	5/24/2021
	Title:	Petroleum Engineer		

V. FINDING

25. ALTERNATIVE SELECTED:

After reviewing the Environmental Assessment, the department has selected the Action Alternative, to perform gravel testing on section 16. I believe this alternative can be implemented in a manner that is consistent with the long-term sustainable natural resource management of the area.

26. SIGNIFICANCE OF POTENTIAL IMPACTS:

I conclude all identified potential impacts will be mitigated by utilizing the stipulations listed below and no significant impacts will occur as a result of implementing the selected alternative.

1. All topsoil will be retained and replaced at the completion of testing operations.
2. Revegetation should occur voluntarily. If the disturbed areas do not come back voluntarily. The DNRC will be responsible for revegetation
3. Any invasive or noxious weeds introduced as a result of gravel testing will be mitigated and eliminated by the DNRC.

27. NEED FOR FURTHER ENVIRONMENTAL ANALYSIS:

[ ] EIS	[ ] More Detailed EA	[X] No Further Analysis	

EA Checklist Approved By:	**Name:** Trevor Taylor **Title:** MMB Bureau Chief	
Signature: Trevor E Taylor		**Date:** 5/24/2021